Reading in the Dark: Flying by the Nets of Politics and Psychoanalysis

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Abstract
Reading in the Dark is a set of stories, dealing with a knot of traumas which have disturbed the Oedipal structure of the I-protagonist's family. Because the tragic events have not been sealed by ritual, the traumatic energy of the three people involved is still haunting the living and affects the family's communications. In that interaction, the Lacanian categories of the imaginary, symbolic and real are realised in an exemplary way. The whole novel consists in the protagonist's effort to balance these three aspects of perception. While he does a fine job as a reader in the dark, he remains an unreliable narrator among his unreliable sources.

1. Introduction

To me, one of the culminating points of 'Irish Literatures at Century's End' is Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996). First, it is a very Irish book: it caused a lot of controversy in Ireland. Second, it is a very condensed kind of literature—as one can expect from a first novel, written by a poet and critic. And third, it consciously echoes other masterpieces of this century, like Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and poems by Heaney,[1] or it refers implicitly to Pearse's blood cult in the symbol of the rose, to Hyde's stance on *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland* and the ensuing debate.[2] It seems as if Deane, the editor of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, uses this creative work to take a very nuanced stance in the controversies that have riddled his country over the past century. Yet, there is a fourth reason why this novel stands out at Century's end. As the title points out, this book stresses that poststructuralist readers (and writers) are aware of the fact that they are reading in the dark. Reading people's lives, their body language and their seemingly simple sayings, is a complex affair; and in the country of Deane's youth, Northern Ireland in the wake of the Troubles, the reading of people's ambiguous utterances is even more complex, and troubling. What I set out to do in this article is to show how, in this novel-memoir, Seamus Deane wants to balance the psychological and the political, the present and the past; and show how they interact.[3] Therefore, my article will concentrate on two aspects of the novel: first, the representation of the family within the political scene, and second, the linguistic devices at work in people's interaction. The psychology of politics is always tied up with language, especially in Ireland—and in Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis.[4]

Language is as basic a component of a person's existence as one's desire and one's unconscious, and all three interact. Deane shows how he is aware of the fact that often many unsaid things ring along with that which is said. In his poetry volume *Rumours* (Deane 1977), dedicated to the hero of *Reading in the Dark*, Deane's father who died 1975, Deane already explores what happens in the un- and preconscious, thus illustrating his sensitivity to the power of the rhetoric of everyday life. In order to concentrate only on what is relevant to politics and psychology, I will limit myself to the use of only two Lacanian concepts, that of the ISR system of perception and that of the Other.

The 'healthy' person reaches a balance between the *Imaginary* dimension of experience, the *Symbolic* and the *Real*. The *imaginary* is the narcissistic component, the self-love which helps people to achor themselves in a habitual, reassuringly positive image of themselves and their values. If this aspect of perception prevails, the I and his fear of rivalry is predominant. The *symbolic* is a denominator for all language systems, not only lingual ones but also the cultural system of gestical and other forms of expression; it is synonymous with the Law, the suprapersonal order. People with a strong symbolic sensitivity will show a great sense of duty. The *real* is that which imbues one with anxiety, with fears which defy articulation. People whose narcissism is overcome with emotions and intimations which disorient them from normal interaction are subject to a perturbed unconscious, to a kind of suprapersonal *dis*order.

The Other is often equated with the 'Thing', the horrible void which appears when the laws (of society) don't work any more. It is 'Other' with a capital letter, since it is different from anything we know. Yet, that Other has its signs, traces, and so it can be perceived indirectly, in the 'object o' (object little o), a liminal point where the phenomenal disappears into that which cannot be categorized any more (when a look detaches itself from the physical bearer, it can persecute you in dreams and hallucinations; it also happens regularly with patients who are subject to great fears, that voices are heard also when the speakers are not present any more).[5]

Like Thebe's, Derry's turmoil is built on *Oedipal troubles* which take on mythic proportions. The human being's imaginative emotional life, that of the phantasms, can be reduced to four basic phantasms: the question of the parents' desire, that of the wishfulfilling mother, the Oedipal triangle and the fear of castration.[6] In *Reading in the Dark*, all four are contaminated by a fatal mistake made by Grandfather Doherty. The protagonist's crucial question is concerned with his parents' desire: what did my parents know, at the time of their engagement, of the fatal entanglements in which the Troubles had enmeshed their families? The narrator finds out that, by allowing his parents' marriage (and hence his own existence) his mother's parents had discarded the basic prohibitions on which society's Law is based: "It should never have been allowed. It was worse than the breaking of *the*

laws of consanguinity that we learned about in Christian doctrine class" (134; my emphasis).

When people infringe on the Law, when they transgress the boundaries of what is normally accepted in human relations, their emotional structure is destabilised and lingual possibilities curtailed. The intensity of these suppressed disturbances, which are given vent to in expressions under and over one's breath, i.e. in mutterings and curses, can distort normal perception. Yet, the protagonist's sensitivity for the "vibes" exuded by his silenced parents makes him notice signals and sobbings, expressions hardly visible nor audible. The absence of his uncle Eddie forms eddies of 'objects o', vague yet powerful signs coming from his father "knowing something about Eddie, not saying it, not talking but sometimes nearly talking, *signalling*. I felt we lived in an empty space with *a long cry from him ramifying* through it. At other times, it appeared to be as cunning and articulate as a labyrinth, closely designed, with someone *sobbing* at the heart of it" (43; my emphasis).

But the secret of Eddie is not only in the fabric of gestural interaction, but also in *things* linked up with the family, like the roses, to which the protagonist's father turns in order to evade his son's questions about his brother. Instinctively, the son feels that the roses' "shining crimson" (104) is linked up with Eddie's fate, which has overtones of Pearse's blood sacrifice for Ireland. Only, the protagonist destroys the roses, and indeed Deane's criticism of the Dark Rosaleen symbol rings throughout this book. So, things share in that mute language which eyes and closed mouths seem to speak in a non-lingual and not quite phenomenal way. But before we go into the different uses of language which characterise the speakers, we will turn to Deane's representation of the main actors in this (politicised) plot.

2. Figures: The Representation of Family and Politics

The Deane and Doherty families are marked with the throes felt at the violent birth of Northern Ireland. The characters reflect a very wide range of the political spectrum and a great many shades within each party.

The grandfather is the type of Irish Irishman, the IRA-fighter whose aims are, as is shown in his fatal mistakes, due to his all-too-proud self-reliance. (Indeed: in a cynical way, this kind of Irish subgroup is shown here to be very good at oppressing themselves.) Grandfather has no time for broad views: compared to what happened in Derry in his own (sorry) lifetime, he considers ancient history as irrelevant. As for languages, only Irish is worthwhile to him; other languages, like French, are a loss of time. In his opinion, sports are exclusively a (political) training ground for Catholics, and in this view he opposes both Deane sr. for whom it is but a game, and Deane jr. who sees it as an art, a dance.

Brief: grandfather Doherty is the typical narcissistic, *Imaginary* father figure: he thinks he *is*, he *embodies* the law. He is of the type Philippe Julien (1991) calls the Roman kind of father, the master-father—but in reality he is a father-out-law, one who out-lawed his future son-in-law. He always acts on his own accord: whether on the polticial or the religious side, he discards any authority beyond himself; and so, at the end of his life, he refuses to ask forgiveness. He makes things even worse when he *perverts* the rituals of his Catholic community: not allowing for a Third instance beyond himself, he will confess his mistakes to his daughter and grandson, thus locking mother and son in a secret they cannot share with the father. In this perverted (mal)confession the grandfather gravely disturbs the oedipal laws, and therefore the fundamental structure of the Deane family.

The protagonist's father, Frank, is the entire opposite of his father-in-law. He is hit and badly hurt by all possible aspects of his country's culture: as a result of the Famine and the Great War, his family's business was ruined; in his early youth, his parents died and his own extended family cheated the children out of their parents' possessions; his brother is killed and his family wrongly accused of being informers;[7] because of the asocial economic system, he loses his pension; and because of the political anarchy, he is not even granted a peaceful retreat from active life. Though he is the one innocent man in the picture, Frank is the most persecuted, and so till the very end of his life: the Protestant police ransack the house in search for a gun, and beat him and his sons up; in the end, he is besieged by noise both outside (the occupation by the British soldiers) and inside (televised propaganda). However, what is important here is that he reacts to it all in a serene way. Thus, he conforms perfectly to the Lacanian model of the *symbolic* father. That means he accepts the law, i.e. authority, not because he agrees with it but because he believes *the general principle* must be obeyed (to avoid further chaos of retaliations on personal grounds); likewise, he shows the greatest reverence for *the particular*, which he acknowledges to be also beyond his grasp: so, he respects the secret of his wife's troubled behaviour, without ever prying on her intimations of a great guilt. Neither power nor possession, but duty is the symbolic figure's main feature. So we hear Frank say to his son: "Freedom. In this place. Never was, never would be. What was it, anyway? Freedom to do what you liked, that was one thing. Freedom to do what you should, that was another" (47).

As to his honesty and sense of Law, language and tradition, he first tries to convey his brother's story by way of Irish legends of Disappeared Persons, and later uses a Church setting to confess what he knows about his brother. Thus, Frank fulfils the role of the father in an exemplary way, in that he also passes on the tradition. As Philippe Julien puts it: "Est père qui s'occupe réellement de l'enfant, c'est-à-dire qui répond à ses droits … à entrer dans le monde de la culture et à s'intégrer à la société" (Julien 1991, 20).[8]

Apart from his law-abiding behaviour, it is his encompassing and honest communication which characterises him as a 'symbolic' figure. Unlike father Doherty, the protagonist's father shows compassion with strangers, and especially those of the 'enemy nation': he shares his lunch with a German prisoner-of-war and offers a cup of tea to the Welsh father whose son has been shot while besieging their area in Derry.

Finally, there is the mother. If grandfather Doherty represents a dominance of the imaginary, narcissistic Irish mind; the protagonist's father the cosmopolitan, symbolic one; the mother is the *real*, embodying the unspeakable. Whereas Frank can forgive all those who wrong him, the mother is so shocked by all the betrayals which shredded her loyalty that she becomes schizophrenic, thus symbolising the state of Northern Ireland, and the old image of Ireland which asks for hard sacrifices.

3. Linguistic Devices at Work in the Narrator's Reading and Stylistics

> I wish I knew what they
> Were saying. I'm never sure
> What it is I hear.
> ("Rumours"; Deane 1977, 19)

As regards communication in general, two points can be made about the figures in *Reading in the Dark*. First, all want *to hide and to communicate simultaneously*: grandfather complains that 'his' history is not told at school (he is mistaken therein), but when asked to talk about it he refuses. The protagonist's father tells his son some legends from Donegal in order to communicate and to hide the fact that his brother disappeared. The son will further use this Gaelic tradition in a give-and-take manner, as he will read the whole family truth outright to his father, but in Irish, so that he is at the same time welcomed to and spared the sad story. A second vital feature of all these conversations is that neither listeners nor speakers *know* what they are hearing or saying. Those who think they know, who think they are in control of things, are treated by the narrator either with a negative role or with metaphors which express the narrator's criticism. We will deal consecutively with the grandfather, Sergeant Burke, the mother and the father; finally, we look at the narrator.

The IRA-grandfather gets the worst treatment. He uses dual language, typical of narcissistic people, who think in terms of rivalry. Like Dante in Joyce's *Portrait*, who symbolised the world with the green and the maroon brush, he has two football teams, "Arsenal and Celtic Strollers, a red-and-white strip for one, green-and-white for the other" (129). Later, he is represented in metaphors of 'static energy': "Shrivelled in his coffin like an ancient child" (127), grandfather remains a figure without development, at once immature and a mummy, a repository of violence. Like Eddie and

McIlhenny, the other two men who disappeared without the benefit of the pacifying ritual forms of farewell the Catholic community provides, grandfather joins those said to remain between life and death; he is felt to be alive in hell, which means that his impact is still felt, his unforgiving attitude still lingers among his descendants.

The narrator, however, strongly criticises this narcissistic character, whose motto, 'myself alone', led him only to precipitated, tragically erroneous actions, the aftermath of which runs like a curse, a plague, through several generations. The young protagonist reacts against this overactive figure in that he is a listener to others, more contemplative and artistic, rather than a man of action.

Though he is more sporting than Stephen Daedalus, the protagonist of *Reading in the Dark* shares that artist's love for the aesthetic rather than the functional aspect of communication. "Football was a dance, not a game. But Grandfather didn't think so" (129). Like Stephen, who rejoices in "lovely foreign names" he finds in a book on Holland (Joyce 1992, 27), this young man loves to concentrate on pure sound: "This was a new illnesss. I loved the names … diphteria, scarlet fever or scarlatina, rubella, polio, influenza; they made me think of Italian football players or racing drivers or opera singers. Each had its own smell … Meningitis. It was a word you had to bite on to say it. It had a fright and a hiss in it" (13–14). The importance of language as an aesthetic tool is something we find time and again stressed in Seamus Deane's critical writings. In a first movement, the opacity of sheer (lingual) beauty can function as an antidote to the willful oversimplification of truths by politicians. Second, it can relate the raw material, the maw of his mother's family troubles, to its dark, old, common sources, like the tragic story of Oedipus's Theban family, and thus at the same time broaden and frame the local tragedy. As Deane puts it in an essay, "The fiction, to perform its necessary function, must have broken its traditional affiliations with history" (Deane 1985, 93). "It involves, first, *a replacement of the political by the aesthetic* … Second the aesthetic, now complete in itself, reabsorbs the political. The onus of distribution has been altered" (Deane 1994, 133; my emphasis). Against the referential (more specifically political) function of language, this artist pitches the aesthetic quality of the words' pure form.

Second comes the Protestant police sergeant Burke. He is a powerful, curse-circuiting rhetorician, whose 'divide et impera' tactics are reflected in his use of language, as he profits from the *discrepancy* between the visual and the auditive. When the protagonist is caught by the police and mumbles curses under his breath, Burke pretends to be writing down names which the protagonist would be giving him. His rhetorics work because he strategically uses people's *stereotype* thinking. "Once an informer, always an informer. That's what they'll say" (99). Though Deane criticises those whose use of "stereotype … reduces stories to one story" (Deane 1994, 134), and so narrow down reality to their own interpretation, he gives Burke a better role

than his grandfather: unlike the latter, Burke is said to have apologized to his mother, wanting to make peace.

Moreover, the I-narrator indicates that he used Burke's own rhetorics of discrepancy, as he retaliates with rumours about Burke having apologized to him, the young boy.[9] Imitating the police's practice of going by what is visible, by what is shown rather than actually said, this politicized community of antagonists strikingly illustrates Lacan's point that not the meaning, but the position of the signifier is of prime importance to the reader's interpretation.[10]

Third, we have the young boy's mother, so much a victim that she turns into a victimizer herself, thus being caught in the round of guilt about unforgiven deeds. Her emotional life is so disturbed that normal perception and speech are destroyed. The fact that the murder of her brother-in-law, Eddie, was due to both the betrayal by her lover, McIlhenny, and her father's execution order, and that she herself is responsible for the exile of McIlhenny, who had become her sister's husband, has caught her in a world of ghosts. This chaotic world can only be described indirectly, in a conundrum uttered by a so-called madman, Crazy Joe: "There's a place where a man died but lived on as a ghost [Eddie], and where another man lived as a ghost but died as a man [Mr Doherty], and where another man would have died as a man but ran away to live as a ghost [McIlhenny]. Where would that place be?" (221).

She lives in a kind of purgatory with three people who have failed to get a proper burial. This situation, whereby the community's customs and language fails to accommodate a person's life, is called life-in-death or death-in-life by W.B. Yeats[11] and Irish folk belief.[12] Another name for this ghostly in-between is 'the second death', as Lacan calls it: when a physical or psychic death is not framed within habitual forms (Eddie was not given a burial service, grandfather refused the necessary rituals of confession and last rites, McIlhenny is dead in the sense that he is unmentionable), the 'dead' person will keep haunting the living. Or, as Zizek would put it, the protagonist's mother lives in "the forbidden domain of the Thing" (Zizek 1991, 25), in some gap in social reality, where the boundaries of the phenomenal world have collapsed under the weight of psychic tensions. This is the area of *le Réel*, which is beyond language.

As a result, the mother's language is the most *opaque*. During her psychic illness (a schizophrenia which may well represent the state of Northern Ireland), she uses three means of expression which are all very dense. First, there is her body language—she is always 'acting out', lingering in 'in between' places: near a window, on the stairs. Actually, the protagonist's 'reading in the dark' is mainly a reading of her *body language*. So he surmises that, when his mother destroys his work on the radio, this action symbolises her demand that he should not communicate her story to others. Second, the laws of articulate speech often fail to work: the mother's

sense of loss is so great that she breaks up her praying lines to weep. So, the ritual of the rosary cannot contain her grief and a "long wail of agony" (18) escapes her. "She was always on the stairs ... sometimes crying out in an incoherent noise ... " (139). Third, at a later stage of her illness, when she is recovering from the worst bout of her psychosis, the mother reverts to *metonymy*, a dreamy language, floating stories parallel to the unspeakable one of her lost love, McIlhenny. Thus, the story of Liadan and Curitir offers her story in a *mise en abyme*.[13] Yet, after her illness, the mother scrambles from the pit of her chaos, insisting all the more fervently on *fixed boundaries*. This colours off on her own body, which becomes as static as the stone in the midst of Yeats's "Easter 1916". Herein, she starts resembling "her father with his Roman stoniness" (228). Once she has found this new order in herself, she defends the vestiges of order with a tenacity which makes her oppose her niece's marriage to a black (172) and maintain that priests never mix in politics—even if they are Protestant policemen's sons. "Don't dare associate one with the other. They belong in different worlds, different worlds" (195), she insists.

In his relation to his mother, the I-protagonist has only one aim: to convey to his mother the idea that he loves her. To communicate this attitude to someone who only wants to hide in her shame, he must try to translate the *real* into the *symbolic*. "I also wanted to run into the maw of the sobbing, to ... make it come at me in *words, words, words and no more of this ceaseless noise, its animality*, its broken inflection of my mother" (143; my emphasis). And yet, the story of this woman whose father and whose ex-lover but brother-in-law (McIlhenny) were responsible for the execution of her other future brother-in-law (Eddie) cannot be told, because, paradoxically, the horrifying links within the family could break the institution of her marriage. The narrator infers that his father feels this too: "did he know and hold in his pain, his suspicions, for saying it out loud would destroy everything, make their marriage impossible?" (223–4).

For my discussion of the narrator's representation of the father, I would like to widen the picture to three innocent figures in this tableau: the protagonist's father, his aunt Katie and Crazy Joe. Strictly speaking, only the father is completely guilt- and guileless, but all three have this in common: they are strongly symbolical, in the double sense that they both guarantee their culture's continuity and open it up to renewal by foreign cultures. All three pass on stories and songs from Donegal; Crazy Joe even informs the boy as to the *dinnseanchas* of the Derry area. All three refer to a world beyond 'the small place' where they live: the father through his self-education with *Pear's Encyclopedia* and his welcoming attitude to foreigners; Katie in her consenting to her daughter's marriage to a black Londoner; and Crazy Joe in his appraisal of *das Ewig-Weibliche* which he sees in the never-ending interactions between Irish ladies and the French court (especially in the form of Miss Louise Murphy, painted by Boucher in

the 18th century and still admired by the protagonist). These three people offer the young artist-protagonist a counterweight to his mother's cramped guilt-ridden silence.

Yet none can speak straightforwardly, either because they don't know the whole truth—both the protagonist's father and his aunt Katie—or because they know but cannot say it—whether intentionally or unintentionally, we do not know as we cannot know how crazy Crazy Joe really is. All figures feel they are lacking vital knowledge about their lives; all feel trapped in some secret entanglement. This is shown in the 'objects o' which beset their mouths and eyes. All the main figures in this book are portrayed with a sealed and distorted mouth: it is not only the protagonist's mother's and grandmother's salient feature, but also his father's, whose "congested mouth" is often focused on. Though the father is usually very articulate, he often acutely feels he is left out of the family-pervading secret and in those moments of tension reverts to speaking in 'objects o' and in metonymies. Interestingly, both these utterances combine in the father, to become a kind of 'objective correlative'. So, the 'vibes' he sends out become literally waves of energy when he sees a boxing match between opponents of unequal strength, an image of "the whole situation [which] makes men evil" (25) which the innocent, law-abiding individual must oppose. He watches the match with growing anger and comments with unusal fervour: "Brave but stupid" (227), whereon he goes out to the back yard to sweep it and then into the coal shed which "shook with the blows" (227).

Auntie Katie's talk is also riddled with 'objects o' and metonymies. One of the most significant inarticulate signs appears while she is wondering why her husband left her, while pregnant, without an explanation. "When she [Katie] said McIlhenny's name, just that, just his surname, she made a noise that sounded like a curse" (128). Her most elaborate metonymy about the family trouble is the changeling story, which is even more clearly linked to the mother's in that Deane's mother's name is used here in the girl Frances who becomes indistinct from her relatives.

Finally there is Crazy Joe, who will or cannot voice the family story. "He … half-whispered, half-shouted a garbled mess of things—stories, questions, conundrums. Sometimes his false teeth shifted in and out; sometimes he seemed unaccountably close to tears; mostly, he beamed fiercely … " (83). Once more, the madman's utterances shift from articulate immaterial to inarticulate material expressions—the teeth themselves being 'expressed'—and the expressions from both eyes and mouth have an intensity yet unaccountability which makes this story-teller only more fascinating to the boy.

How does the protagonist react to all these sources of information? He is attracted by the more opaque (his mother) and preferably beautiful aspects of language (versus his grandfather); he is aware of possible discrepancies and of the importance of contextuality (Burke); and he

experiences how the stories that course through the extended family carry something of a curse that endangers the very existence of the his household. Especially father, mother and son are oppressed into a silence that exudes the 'vibes' the protagonist is sensitive to: "I felt we lived in an empty space with *a long cry from him ramifying* through it. At other times, it appeared to be as cunning and articulate as a labyrinth, closely designed, with someone *sobbing* at the heart of it" (43; my emphasis). The young boy gradually becomes an expert reader of 'objective correlatives', dense signs (roses, body language, overtones, layered metaphors and ramifying metonymies) which touch on the marital secret, and this growing ability to read in the dark is reflected in the growing complexity of the style figures he builds into his counterlabyrinth, the mosaic of this novel. Like Deane's poems, this novel is very lyrical, a composition built upon rhythmical variations of words and motifs. Every chapter is brief and dense and has a brief title, like a poem—or like a short alley into the labyrinth. Only, at the end of the book, this narrator does not leave the labyrinth: the ultimate story remains unclear, due to strange discrepancies which creep into the narrator's account of his parents' story. At one stage the protagonist hears Crazy Joe saying he saw McIlhenny getting out of the police car on "the eighth *of July* 1926" (192; my emphasis); later he reports how his mother "... had Joe tell what he saw that night of the eighth *of December* 1926 when he saw McIlhenny get out of Burke's police car" (229; my emphasis). Another confusing passage occurs when the I-narrator tells us how "there were all those years since their marriage in 1933" (223), while earlier on we had been told that "They married in 1935" (183). Indeed, the narrator tells us how "the anniversaries: of all the deaths, all the betrayals ... began to become confused and muddled, and I wondered at times had I dreamed it all" (225).

That Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* is one of the great books of 'Irish Literatures at Century's End' is shown in the masterful interactions between aesthetics and epistemology, the magic and the tragic. In the multitude of (vices and) voices which make up the story, this novel offers us the dazzling richness of Irish literature, as a creative counterpart to Deane's surveys of Irish literature. Father and mother, relatives, friends and opponents, speak and sing, curse and cry, hide and hint in signals and songs. Insinuations and fairy tales, hagiography and demonology, factual and emotional truths and half-truths, lies, threats, mistakes, ignorance, oblivion ... all interact: "Their voices chorused back and forth" (38).

The novel is 'postmodern' in that it does not pretend to be able to discover some final truth; what seems more important is that we are shown how a willing suspension of belief, the discipline to refuse to take things at face value, can help to fathom the dark complexity of seemingly simple yarns.

In this novel, Deane wants to be the *senchaid* of people who have been destroyed by rumours. All through the novel, Eddie's name is eddying

through people's stories. These are moulded in many different genres: *dinnseanchas*, conundrums, prayers, litanies, jokes, legends, satires, curses, poems and songs. Fragments from Latin, Irish, French, English, Italian literature add to the complexity and open up the Derrydean tragedy to universal proportions. I am sure that *Reading in the Dark* will appeal to many more literary critics, for the depth and sound psychology of it, the nuanced view of his country's politics and the brilliant trouvailles of its style.

NOTES

[1] Deane is a prominent Joyce scholar, and has written an illuminating introduction to the Penguin edition of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and to *Finnegans Wake*, besides a great many excellent articles on the rest of Joyce's work. Some parallels between *Reading in the Dark* and Heaney's work are almost literal echoes from passages in *North*. So the scene where Sergeant Burke comes to the protagonist's house has strong overtones from Heaney's "A Constable Calls", in *North*. Both also mention the "Inferiority / Complexes" the priests at school tried to talk them into. The Catholic fathers wielded their authority in a "ministry of fear" almost equalling that of the Protestant state. "'What's your name, Heaney?'/ 'Heaney, Father.'/ 'Fair/ Enough.'" (Heaney 1975, "Singing School: The Ministry of Fear"). It should not surprise us that this very poem was dedicated to Seamus Deane. Deane varies on this scene in his chapter "Maths Class": "'What's your name, Duffy?' 'Duffy, Father.' 'Glad to hear it … '" (Deane 1996, 91). From now on I will only indicate the page if I quote from *Reading in the Dark*.

[2] Extracts from *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland* appear in Deane 1991, vol. 2, 527–33.

[3] As for the term "novel-memoir", it is important to mention here that Deane clearly wanted to establish a link but simulaneously a rupture between fact and fiction. This is shown in the fact that all paternal names linked with the author have been erased from the novel: so the I-protagonist is never named, and neither are his father or his siblings, unless by Christian name. On the other hand, the author's photograph is on the cover. In his focus on the interaction between psychology and politics, present and past, Deane practises in this book what he observed in Joyce's *Ulysses*, where "history is not a record of facts but the material of their consciousness … in it, the kaleidoscope of past and present can be constantly shaken to form transient patterns which are not essentially historical but psychological" (Deane 1985, 101; my emphasis).

[4] So John Banville pointed out in an interview with me that in Ireland politics is nothing but language. "The Irish are obsessed with language. All our public scandals have to do with language. If a politician does something

dreadful, the scandal will be about how he explains himself: not about what he did, but about how he accounts for what he did. It always goes back to language ..." (Schwall 1997a, 18). Lacan's re-reading of Freud and his talking cures led him to define man as a 'speaking being' (*un animal parlant, un parlêtre*), thus varying significantly on Aristotle's concept of a 'rational animal'.

[5] The 'object o' is usually connected with that which is cast out, like the look and the voice, which become independent from a bearer, a subject. But the Other is also felt indirectly when the basic distinctions, between life and death, or between the sexes, disappear, as in the Frances/Francis story, told by aunt Katie. Significantly, the children who swap eyes, mouths and sex, do so because their hearing and seeing is dominated by their dead parents, till they disappear on their parents' grave and thus belong to the life-in-death condition which is neither death nor life. This story clearly is a *mise en abyme* for the condition of the mother, who suffers so much from her family's trespassing against basic laws, that the two essential boundaries that must help a subject to structure his/her life—the one between life and death, and the one between the sexes—do not work any more with her. As a result of their discarding of basic laws, the Symbolic (structured language) does not work well, her self-love is destroyed (the Imaginary dimension) and so her perception is dominated by the unchannelled emotions of fear and guilt: the Real. For a more in-depth analysis of the 'object o', see Schwall 1997b.

[6] It is worth noticing that the narrator uses the word "phantasm" explicitly in the 'title chapter', "Reading in the Dark" (21). Only, the teacher condemns the protagonist for using such learned words. For an excellent essay on the function of phantasms, see Bernet 1988, 171–84.

[7] On top of all that, the brother suffers a 'second death' in the sense that he cannot be mourned, since the truth about his brother cannot be told for fear the marriage would not hold. So Eddie is not only physically dead but also in a psychological and social way: what really happened to him can never be told.

[8] So we see a clear difference between the imaginary and the symbolic father, which could be equated with the salient difference Julien (1991) sees between the father figure in Roman and in Christian culture: while the former is a master-father, the latter is seen as a servant to his child. The Christian father loves the child, whereas the Roman one rules it. In *Reading in the Dark* the father is clearly of the second kind. This is underscored by another poem on Frank Deane from the poet's volume *Rumours*:

> For he was the very Idea of a father,
> Oddly proximate to daughter and to son,
> Not fully himself to any one.
> ("Unsung", Deane 1977)

[9] The protagonist was caught by the police and set up as an informer, thus causing him and his whole family to be ostracized from the rest of their community. But the boys set up a clever scheme: saying he wants to apologize to Burke, the protagonist can convince the bishop's assistant to go with him into the police barracks, while his brother makes sure everyone has noticed this. They are also seen to come out of there together. Since no one will ever know what was actually said inside, he can safely maintain that the high Church official demanded that Burke apologized to the boy. So he is, thanks to this ruse, both redeemed of his role as informer but also seen as a hero of their own Catholic community.
[10] In "Le séminaire sur 'la lettre volé'" (Lacan 1966, 11–61), a seminal essay on Poe's "The Purloined Letter", Lacan shows that he vital letter which is stolen and sought by the different parties is kept sealed to the reader. The contents of the key object of the story are never mentioned: they are not relevant. Pinpointing this striking feature of the story, Lacan reveals that not the content of the letter, but its position in the circuit of interest people is what gives the owner power.
[11] "Before me floats an image, man or shade, / Shade more than man, more image than a shade; / For Hades' bobbin bound in mummycloth / May unwind the winding path; / A mouth that has no moisture and no breath/ Breathless mouths may summon;/ .. I call it death-in-life and life-in-death" ("Byzantium", *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*; Yeats 1981, 280).
[12] The motif of the changeling is very important in this book, especially in the Francis/Frances story, but a detailed account would be beyond the scope of this article. It is all about people who change from normal perception to the world of the Other, where the unconscious overrules conscious interaction.
[13] Curithir was the beloved of Liadan, a poetess. As she has vowed herself to another (God), she sends him away, though she loves him. Yet, later regrets this bitterly, and goes to search for him, but in vain. In *Reading in the Dark*, the mother has been turned down by her lover and therefore takes 'revenge' by exiling him from her proximity and from his own family. So after he was discovered to be an informer, he is shipped to Chicago. In Liadan's laments the relation with her lover seemed to promise Paradise on earth; in the Derry story the mother identifies with that desire, yet she cannot give vent to her lament, as her guilt is mixed up by deadly political intrigue. So she only hints at the similarity between her lost love and Liadan's.

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